

Oxford Intersections: Climate Adaptation

“Polycentric Collaborations for Adaptation” Section

Deadline for submissions: 7 September 2026

Content overview:

This section is guided by the following question: how can place-based communities work collaboratively with central and local governments to lead or help shape their own climate responses? Its central premise is that climate change cannot be treated as an isolated phenomenon; it is an integral part of a global polycrisis and metacrisis that includes resource depletion, biodiversity loss, socio-economic inequities, and systemic destabilisation driven by historical overconsumption. We are interested in how polycentric arrangements facilitate, or hinder, the coordination needed to face these intersecting shocks.

From this central issue, other questions emerge: what factors facilitate or hinder the building of trust and cooperation between communities and governments in addressing climate change? In what ways can local and traditional knowledges be integrated into institutional climate adaptation policies? How can historically underrepresented groups occupy leadership positions in collaborative climate adaptation processes? How can successful adaptation experiences driven by polycentric arrangements be communicated and replicated?

Drawing on polycentrism as an approach that values collective and complex action across different spheres of power, this section is interested in work that explores how the distribution of authority and responsibility among multiple actors — including local, regional, and national governments, civil society organisations, the private sector, academia, and traditional peoples and communities — can address the current climate situation and intervene in the broader context of the existing polycrisis. We are particularly interested in understanding how local-level solutions are, or are not, informing responses at broader scales, and how they can be scaled up through networks and coordination.

Furthermore, the multiplication of decision-making centres also requires the democratisation of access to these centres, in line with a climate justice perspective. The populations most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as low-income communities, racialised groups, Indigenous peoples and traditional communities, women, and those living in ecologically fragile territories, are, paradoxically, those who have contributed least to the causes of the climate crisis. Polycentric governance thus offers an opportunity to address this asymmetry, as the distribution of decision-making among multiple actors fosters institutional spaces in which historically marginalised voices have the opportunity to shape adaptation strategies.

Scope:

We invite single- and multi-authored contributions from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, including cross-disciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches, that engage critically and empirically with the challenges and opportunities of polycentric governance in the context of climate change adaptation.

Submissions may draw on theoretical frameworks, comparative analyses, case studies, or participatory research methods. We particularly encourage contributions that centre the perspectives

of communities on the frontlines of climate impacts and that interrogate the conditions under which decentralised governance arrangements can be made more just, effective, and inclusive. This section engages with studies from various disciplinary fields that address the following dimensions of polycentrism:

- The political-institutional dimension of polycentrism, that is, how different levels of government articulate vertically and horizontally and how non-state actors fill institutional gaps in climate adaptation
- The territorial and community dimension, that is, how community-based and traditional forms of territorial management function as legitimate models of adaptation
- The epistemic and knowledge dimension, that is, how scientific, local, and traditional knowledges are produced, shared, and applied in polycentric arrangements for climate adaptation
- The participation and representation dimension, that is, how polycentric governance can expand access for underrepresented groups to decision-making spaces on climate adaptation
- The experimentation dimension, that is, how polycentric models foster the production, testing, and diffusion of adaptive innovations across different actors and territorial scales
- The financial and control dimension, that is, how financial resources are mobilised, distributed, and monitored to support adaptation strategies across multiple territorial scales

How to propose an article:

If you are interested in proposing an article, please submit a proposal of max. 300 words through our submission form by 7 September 2026, with information on author name(s) and institution(s), and, for multi-authored articles, author order. The form is available at: <https://bit.ly/4wShfGQ>

If you have an idea or an initial enquiry, just get in touch by email at emae.ufsc.br@gmail.com. We look forward to hearing from you!

Articles should be 6,000-10,000 words in length and will undergo rigorous peer review overseen directly by the Intersections team at Oxford University Press. They will form citable, primary research outputs.

Our deadline for agreed articles for “Polycentric Collaborations for Adaptation” is 1st February 2029.

Polycentric Collaborations for Adaptation Section Editors

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